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SUBJECT: DCM MEETS WITH UN,S IRAQ DEPUTY

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel Speckhard for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a November 16 meeting with the DCM, the deputy for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Michael von Schulenburg, discussed the UN's role in Iraq. Von Schulenburg commented that the UN could play a prominent role in Kirkuk; however, he does not believe the Kurds will allow it. He views the constitutional review process as an opportunity to fix existing problems and further reconciliation. The UN hopes to expand its abilities by hiring local Iraqis to work as political officers in various UN offices throughout the country, beginning in early ¶2007. End Summary.

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Possible UN Involvement with Kirkuk  
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¶2. (C) Von Schulenburg noted that the Iraqis have not offered much support for expanding the UN's role in Iraq, even in areas where the UN has expertise. When asked whether the UN feels restricted by the U.S. presence in Iraq, von Schulenburg responded that while the USG plays the largest role in Iraq, he has not found that it restricts the UN. Part of the problem, he said, is that the UN's role in Iraq remains unclear. The UN's challenge is to define its mission and provide adequate resources for the mission to succeed.

¶3. (C) When asked where the UN's role could be most effectively expanded, von Schulenburg responded that the UN could provide technical assistance to Kirkuk's normalization and referendum. This issue deals with constitutions, elections and borders, he noted, areas where the UN has significant experience. He reported that he had recently spoken with Badr Corps leader Hadi al-Amiri and Vice President Adil Abdul Mahdi (SCIRI) about potential UN involvement in Kirkuk. They seemed interested, he said, but the problem will be the Kurds. According to von Schulenburg, the Kurds view the UN "as a spoiler" in the Kirkuk issue and for that reason will resist UN involvement.

¶4. (C) When asked why the Kurds would not support UN involvement in Kirkuk, von Schulenburg said it is because the UN would work to find a solution to Kirkuk through a political process which involves Iraq's neighbors, namely Turkey and Iran. "The Kurds cannot survive in a sea of hatred," von Schulenburg warned. If the UN were involved in the Kirkuk referendum, he continued, we would ensure a transparent process which would add legitimacy to the final decision. As it stands now, von Schulenburg pointed out, the Kurds are claiming lands "from Syria to Iran" and more than half of the land they claim lies outside the current Kurdish region borders. Finally, von Schulenburg stated that the Kurds believe the USG supports their desire to annex Kirkuk to the Kurdish region, and therefore have no reason to invite or support UN interference.

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Constitutional Review: An Opportunity for Reconciliation  
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¶5. (C) Turning his attention to constitutional review process, von Schulenburg commented that this allows for an opportunity to address some of the major problems in the current constitution, including provincial powers and the central government's authorities. While the Sunnis need to accept federalism, he stressed, it does not mean that Iraq has to become a confederation. Right now, von Schulenburg said, the federal government cannot even raise taxes. While Iraq will never again have a strong centralized government, he questioned whether the international community really wants Iraq to go to the other extreme where regions are so much more powerful than the federal government.

¶6. (C) In addition to strengthening the central government and addressing problems within the constitution, the review process can aid reconciliation, von Schulenburg predicted. It can be seen "as a peace offering," he added, and it allows people outside of the current government another opportunity to join the political process. He cautioned, however, that Iraq's current reconciliation program assumes "there is a commonly accepted solution that the groups are working towards." We still need dialogue, he said, and constitutional review could further this effort.

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